filmart

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VOLUME TWO

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film art

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civilisation ltd.?

PLAN FOR A WAR FILM

B. VIVIAN BRAUN

(To-day, in 1934, on November the eleventh there is a curious affair called Armistice. On the whole it is about the most convincing glorification of war ever held. Fine trumpets blare out grand posts before and after two minutes silence, during which impressive guns thunder out their supposed regret and remembrance. And, still more impressive than all the rest, are grand march pasts with dazzling uniforms, which in themselves may be the product of the harmless love of pageantry, but which in this instance are a bitter distortion of ghastly facts.

But, if one thinks for a moment, the most amazing part of the 'war remembrance' ceremonial is the audience which with all appearance of sincerity attends (possibly at the Cenotaph itself) the inspiring performance.

There is the ordinary person like you or I who may or may not have seen the last war (in my particular case, have not) but who have a pretty shrewd idea of its nature. Our desire, needless to say, is peace, but we realise that there are things to be fought. There is the colossal international fight to make this world endurable and pleasurable to everybody; beginning with the fight against unemployment and poverty, the fight against slums, against national barriers, against hatred of other nations, against the dishonesty which over-rules mass commercialism.

It is a fight to show life worth living. And a fight to show how it can be lived.

There is the man for whom we should fight. The man who starves, the outcast, the unemployed, the unwanted, the wasted humanity. While he starves he cannot but think that another war would provide, at any rate for a short time, food and clothing. After all what has life to offer him and his thousand brethren? Is there anything worse than starvation, misery, filth, stark poverty, bitter humiliation?

And—over there—stand the politicians, who pretend that the last war was for the sacred cause of Justice and the Freedom of the world, and who will go on pretending that, while they waste their miserable lives with deceiving prattle and living on the fat of the land.

And akin to them (if they are not the individuals concerned as is so often the case) stand the armament manufacturers. Guns must be made, bombs must be produced, battleships must be launched, war planes must be manufactured, otherwise how can they get £20,000 a year? And so the mass of helpless workers they employ stand with their bosses, probably their future murderers. For two minutes they stand and remember the pretty pictures of gutted-out stomachs, faces that have been blown off, and arms and legs that belong to a body one hundred yards away. And with these physical horrors, they can remember their starving mothers, brothers and sisters. Bread queues and ration tickets. And, at home, misery almost equal. Mothers whose young, and sometimes only, sons are at present lying rotting on barbed wire. And girls whose future husbands lie in the same state.

And in a little while they turn back—to the factory. Is it England—with

Metropolitan-Vickers? Is it France—with Shneider-Creusot? Is it Germany —with Krupp? But what does it matter? What difference if they are machines to kill French, German or any other men? Very likely they are machines for export. Gas that will one day be returned to fill their own lungs with burning poisons . . . Does it really make any difference, in war, by whose hand one dies?
Is humanity to become the fodder for Civilisation Ltd.?

B. V. B.

The following is the very rough plan for a dynamic film to expose a few doubtful facts, and propose a remedy. A film ruthless in its realism, truth, sincerity, and dynamicness. A film that will be made when and if finance permits it.

THE ONE
(peace)
Life. The brotherhood of man. Beauty created by Man, by Nature.
Happiness of a decent existence.

THE OTHER
(war)
No longer what it was.
W A R
Gas-torture, chemical inferno.
Filth, intolerable suffering.
Hunger, misery, hell-on-earth.
VICTORS !
HEROES ! !
THE VICTORIOUS ! ! (minus legs, or arms, or eyes, or nose, or face, smashed limbs, hopeless dis-figurement, lungs burned up, insides gutted out, stomachs supported with metal, " how to use a bayonet decently ".)
VICTORIOUS LAND OF FREEDOM !
Unemployment, filth, misery, lives ruined, millions—MILLIONS ruined, utterly, hopelessly, despairingly, complete misery, BITTERNESS
V I C T O R Y ?

THE PRESENT CAUSES
Mis-guided patriotism. Armament traffic, Vickers, Shneider-Creusot, Krupp. Ignorance of facts. Public school system (" How to use a bayonet gentlemanly "). Rot about " Liberty ".

PROPAGANDA
(" DO YOU WANT YOUR HOMES OVER-RUN BY THESE DOGS?")
(" WILL YOU ALLOW YOUR SISTER TO BE RAPED BY THESE LICE?")
The old school.
" HONOUR (swallow mustard gas) and your COUNTRY " (desolated landscapes, towns wiped out)
" Remember England " (and see it a mass of gas-ruined country-side.)
" Remember you're a Britisher " (therefore smash the once-happy lives of people speaking a different language to you. Watch them endure physical agony unimaginable, watch them starve, then do so yourself " FOR LIBERTY AND GOD!").

" They died for you, you should die for them ".
THEY DIED FOR YOU. YES. IN ORDER THAT YOU MIGHT NOT KNOW SUCH A FILTHY HELL, IN ORDER THAT A BETTER WORLD MIGHT EVOLVE FROM FOUR YEAR'S INSANE MURDER WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?
FIGHT !
Fight?
(*There are many things to fight, things that call for heroes greater than those in any war*)
FIGHT the things that ruin us and others.
Fight UNEMPLOYMENT, misery, FIGHT FOR FOOD AGAINST THE CONDITIONS OF NATURE.
We must fight for INTERNATIONALISM.
Fight, not nationally, but internationally.
THE OLD BARRIERS MUST GO.
New work to be done.
New things to accomplish.
A new life to live.
Your enemies THEIR enemies.
Action!
ON.
To a common end.
Away with the ruiner of life, the promoter of misery!
ENTER A NEW LIFE
On!
BRAVE NEW WORLD
International thought
A new understanding between the common peoples of the world.
ON

open letter to dr goebbels

S. M. EISENSTEIN

Herr Doctor!

It will doubtless not distress, and possible not even surprise you to learn that I am not a subscriber to the German Press now so neatly uniformalised under your aegis.

Usually I don't even read it.

This is why you should be surprised that I happen, though rather belatedly, to have learned of the latest of your appearances before the assembled cineastes of Germany at the Kroll Opera House in Berlin on February the 10th.

On this appearance you once more honoured with laudatory mention my film, " The Battleship Potemkin."

More, for a second time, just as a year ago, you were good enough to hold it up as a pattern of quality that National-Socialist films should emulate.

That you should send your film-people to study your enemies shows wisdom.

But in doing so you commit just one tiny little methodological error.

Allow me to point it out.

And please don't be cross if you don't like it when you see it.

We didn't set ourselves up to teach you—you asked for it yourself.

Man is born to error.

And deeply erroneous is your hypothesis that in some manner it may be possible for Fascism to give rise to a great Germanic art of the films—

Even with the utmostly benevolent assistance of an Aryan Holy Ghost such as you have cast your good self to be.

" The proof of the pudding is in the eating "—Engels somewhere reminds us.

A sad deal of time is already sped, and your much belauded National Socialism has not yet produced in any of the arts anything even in the least digestible.

Accordingly it looks as though you might have to appear quite frequently with speeches on the lines of the one you have delivered twice already

A stale and ungrateful occupation—acting as inspiration to a cinema that had no few achievements in the past but is now stifling in the thumbscrews of Fascism.

I firmly and most profoundly believe that the German working-class will not be long helping you to rid yourself of this tiresome and unprofitable task. But in case you should have time for another of these speeches, it is surely unthinkable that so illustrious a bigwig as yourself should be permitted to indulge yet once again in such flagrant methodological mistakes.

Encouraged by thunderous applause, you drew a handsome sketch of the creative programme of the German cinema:— . . . *real life must once more be made the basic stuff of films!* . . ." (1)

" With courage and daring, unafraid of difficulty or failure, we must tackle the life of reality. The more failures, the more savagely we must attack these problems. Where would we be now if we had lost courage at each failure? (Loud applause). Now that rubbishy entertainment is being eliminated from social life, you, creators of the art of the cinema are faced with the task of approaching and tackling the theme of the immortal German People. Tackling that People whom none knows better than we. . . . Every People is what is made out of it (Bravo!) And what can be made of the German People has already been sufficiently demonstrated. (Stormy applause).

" The Public does not reject art.'

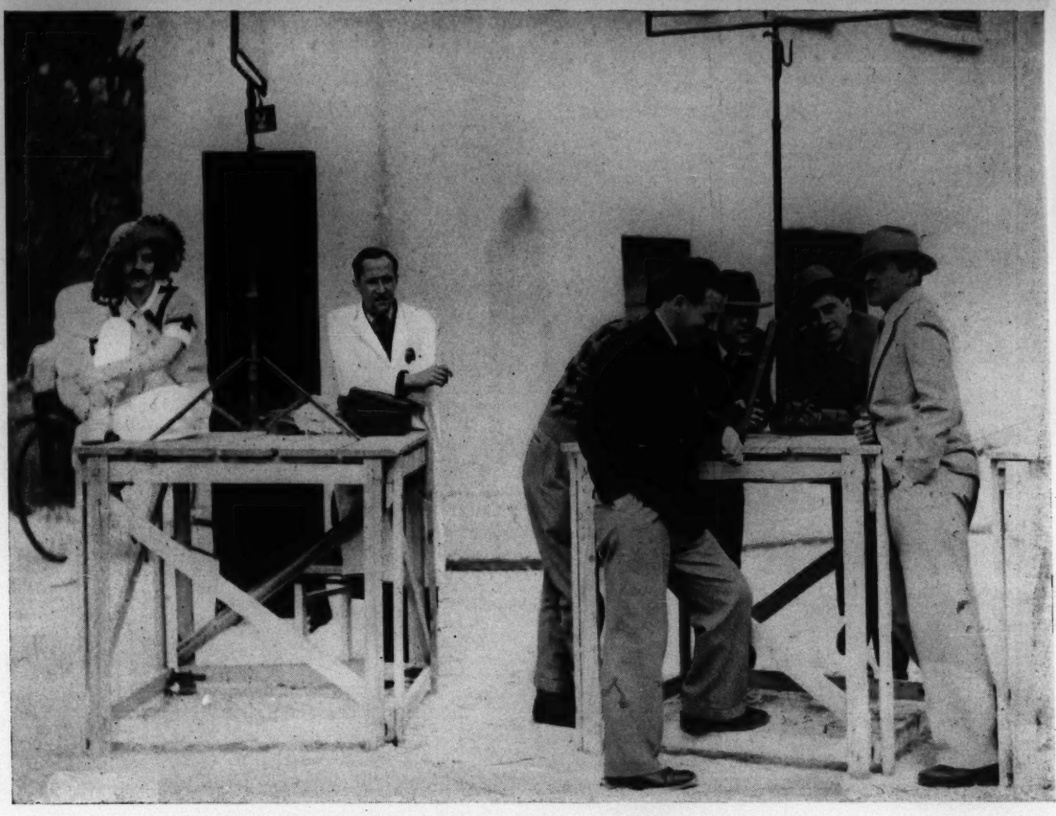
" AND I AM CONVINCED THAT IF WE DID PUT ON HERE IN ONE OF OUR CINEMA PALACES A FILM THAT DID ACTUALLY EMBRACE OUR ERA, THAT WAS ACTUALLY A REAL NATIONAL-SOCIALIST " Battleship Potemkin," THE HOUSE WOULD BE SOLD OUT AND FOR A RECORD RUN!" (1)

When you say " Battleship " I presume you have in mind not only my " Potemkin " but in fact the whole victorious squadron of our films of the last few years.

And in sooth, what a brilliant, what a dazzlingly brilliant programme.

We all know that only true life, the truth of life and its true presentation

Design
by Oswell Blakeston



Rene Clair, on right, during the filming of *Le Dernier Milliardaire*

Suburbia: Boris Barnet (Russian)

do and can serve as a basis for true art.

And what a masterpiece could be a truthful film of German to-day.

However, for realisation of your brilliant programme you certainly need counsel.

You certainly need counsel. And not just one only, but many, many counsels.

Let's give it you straight from the shoulder:—

A whole regime of councils!

For in our days great art, the true picturisation of life, the truth of life, even life itself is possible only in a land of Soviets, whatever that land's name may have been in the past.

Whereas truth and National-Socialism are a contradiction in terms.

He who follows truth cannot follow the path of National-Socialism.

He who is for truth is against you!

How dare you speak of life at all and anywhere, you who with axe and machine-gun are bringing death and exile to everything live and worth-while in your country?—and are slaughtering the best sons of the German working-class and scattering like ashes throughout the world those who are the pride of German science and the culture of the world?

How dare you call upon your film organisation to portray life truthfully without demanding of it first of all to portray to the world the thousands languishing and maltreated in the subterranean catacombs of your prisons, the torture chambers of your fortresses?

How can you contrive the impudence even to mention truth after the Babel Tower of muddle, impudence and lies that you built up at Leipzig? And at a moment when you are feverishly constructing just such another edifice of falsehood and treachery against Thaelmann?

In the voice of the good shepherd you thus pursue your oration:—

" . . . if only I receive the conviction that behind any film there lies honest, artistic endeavour, I shall foster and defend it by every means. . . . " (Same speech).

You are lying, Mr. Goebbels.

You know only too well that an honest and artistic film could only be one which would expose to its full depth the hell in which Germany has been plunged by National-Socialism.

You would hardly encourage *such a film!*

Real German film art is that which would call upon the revolutionary masses of Germany to fight you.

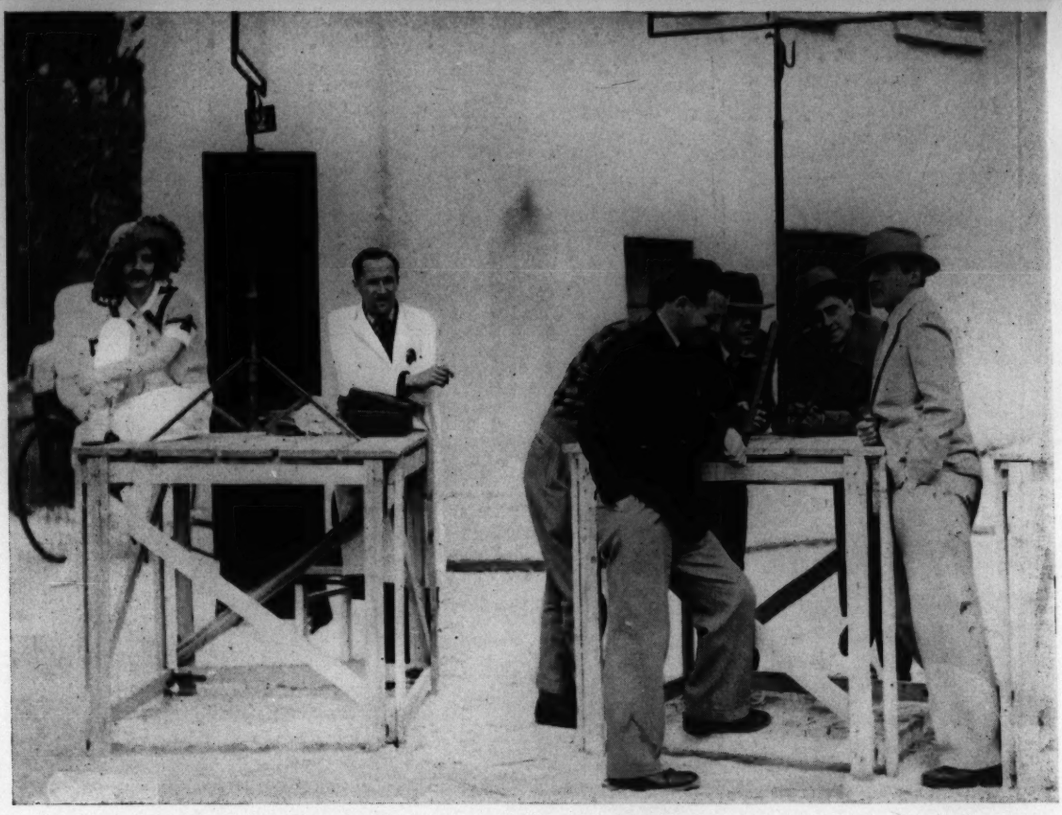
For that, real courage and daring is certainly necessary.

Because despite all the sweet tunes of your speeches, you keep your art and culture in the same iron fetters as the thousands of your prisoners in the hundreds of your concentration camps.

And works of art are not born as you imagine them.

We, for example, know and some of our work has proved besides, that works that deserve that title do, have done, and will do so only by virtue of the fact that, through the medium of the creative artist, is expressed the spring-tight, clearly formulated, determined striving of the class.

Rene Clair, on right, during the filming of *Le Dernier Milliardaire*



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Real and true work is the formulised striving of the class to consolidate its struggle, its achievements, its social pattern in the indestructible images of art.

And the higher the work of art, the better has the artist succeeded in understanding, in feeling and in transmuting this creative striving of the masses themselves.

You do not view thus class and the masses.

As you say; " . . . Every People is what is made out of it . . . " And there can be found idiots who applaud you at this point of your speech.

Just wait a little. The working-class will make its own correction of this conception, if one may call it such, Mr. Demiurge of Divine Power.

Then you will learn who is the real force of history.

You will learn then who makes whom, and what will be done with you and . . . out of you.

War, it is said, gives birth to heroes.

Mountains, it is said, give birth to mice.

But no Goebbels, aspiring to give birth to a New Germany, like Athena, from his head, is capable of giving birth to a great National-Socialist cinema!

Strain as you may, you cannot create a National-Socialist realism!

For in that lying mongrel there would be as much real truth and realism as there is on National-Socialist . . . Socialism.

Which quantity has been exactly estimated by Comrade Stalin in his report to the XVIIIth Party Congress.

Not an atom!

" . . . I refer not to Fascism in general, but here primarily to Fascism of the German type, incorrectly designated National-Socialism, for despite the most scrupulous investigation it is impossible to descry in it even an atom of Socialism . . . (From Comrade Stalin's report *Pravda,* 28/1/34.)

Only a true Socialist order such as that of the Soviet Union is capable of giving birth to a great realistic art in the future and in the present.

Of it you can only dream.

Even to guess you find difficult. Always wrong, and wrong end foremost. You are fortune-telling with the wrong pack. However you sharp you can't help yourself.

Go on painting the Prussian blue of your lyrical projects. But learn and know that only a true socialism and a programme of socialist attack guarantees a creative programme in all kinds of arts.

The wireless of the Arctic heroes of the *Chelyuskin* informs you that, locked in and marooned upon the ice, they derive new strength and an access of creative energy listening to the report to the XVIIth Congress of the Central Committee of the All-Union Community Party (Bolsheviks).

Locked in your fetters for long weary months, your victims and our heroes Dimitrov, Tanev and Popov were deprived of all connection with the outside world. At some happy instant for a few days the isolation was broken. A newspaper penetrated to them. On its pages this same report. This moment, these printed columns, sufficed to compensate for all these months of suffering. From Tanev's own lips, a day after his return, I heard what they meant

for your prisoners. They were a tide of new energy and new heart for the pitiless fight.

In those columns is everything that every " soldier of the revolution " (to use the Soviet citizen Dimitrov's phrase) must have known a year ago and know for many a year to come.

In those columns is everything on which to base the creative programme of a " soldier of the art revolution " in any branch of arms—literature, art, cinema—in its share of the last fight for a classless society.

It is the perfect example of socialist realism in action.

It is also the perfect pattern of socialist realism for all the sectors of artistic creation.

It is not the empty cymbals of your speeches.

After pledging your high patronage to " honest, artistic endeavour " in any film you benevolently add:—

" . . . but I do not insist that a film should begin and end with a National-Socialist procession. Leave the National-Socialist processions to us—we know how to do them better than you . . . " (Same speech.)

Well said! Most truly said!!

Get back to your drums, Master Drummer-in-chief!

Stop disporting yourself with ritual pipings on the magic flute of National-Socialist realism in the cinema.

Stop imitating your idol, Frederick the Great, and on his own flute, too.

Just stay at your more congenial instrument—the axe.

Don't wast your time to no purpose.

It's not much longer that you'll be able to wield that axe.

So go it, while the going's good!

Burn books.

Burn the Reichstag.

But don't imagine that a parade-ground art reared on all this filth will ever be able to " burn with its voice the hearts of men."

S. M. EISENSTEIN.

Moscow.

whither films?

MICHAEL BALCON

If Oliver Wendell Holmes had lived a little later he would almost certainly have visited Hollywood and delighted us all with " The Producer at the Breakfast Table ". The absence of that work is a definite loss to the art and industry of film-making, if only because few members of the fraternity have time to philosophise *en pantoufles* and so we miss much healthy criticism. No one can blame me, therefore, if unfettered by the chain of criticism I take the reckless path of conjecture and write of the future of films. In any case controversy on this point is so keen that my voice will probably not be heard above the din of battle.

A definition will help. Not that I would have the temerity to define the word ' films '. We may, however, ask ourselves what we mean by a future. It is an example of a not uncommon practice, the use of a time notion to signify development; or else it is just a banality. In other words I am committed to discuss the development of films.

How have they fared in the past? In less than fifty years the family has become as well established as if it had come over with the Conqueror. One branch has followed a trail from the shadow of Barnum and Bailey's big drum to the awful and esoteric cloisters of the elite. The other lives as happily in Belgravia as in the lowly air of Seven Dials; the friend of everybody.

Both branches, again like Norman stock, are objects of interest to the gossip writers.

Though one of them has gone into big business and embarrasses the other by retaining a tendency to wear coloured waistcoats and checks, they are still on speaking terms. In fact in the future I see them, and here begins the first prophecy, growing nearer together. In other words while M. Jourdain will always talk prose, he will gradually learn to talk better prose.

Does this mean that the day will come when the whole world—I express it in this way with all deference—will become one happy Film Society? I do not think so. Let us look for a moment at our venerable stepbrother the theatre. Up to the second marriage of Katharsis, when she took Camera for husband, he monopolised what is often called the entertainment business. He is old and wise and has the freedom of Olympus. It would be an impertinence to despise his experience. He is not an old curmudgeon. He has eternal youth and so without fear of a pompous " Ah my boy . . ." let him prophecy.

He will go to human nature and tell us we shall always be dependent on the whims of man if we are to live. He will point proudly to a thousand volumes, the works of genius, but the words in them are in the form of print and are not echoed through the air. Then he will tell us of those others, the names of which are hardly now remembered but which in their day were the delight of hundreds of thousands. He will mention the word box-office and leave it at that. He will mention the word story and not expect to have to insist. He will talk of emotion, but I doubt if he will bother with mood, or with a host of abstract psychological and technical terms.

I gather from his point of view, then, that while Sophocles and Shakespeare, Calderon and Molière once made him free of Olympus, to-day the adroitness of Buster T. Hank provides him with a bank balance.

Looking into the future, if I understand him, I must say that not all the camera angles, not all the oblique, diagonal, perpendicular, or periscopic shots in the world will save us now and forever more if we do not tell a story as man, from whose life we learn it, lives it every day. There is confusion, delirium; there are dreams of escape; but one smile, one tear seen as the eye sees it and not through the microscope of a psycho-analyst, will do more to move the world than all the Joycean impressionism that ever was.

We shall always need simplicity. The lavishness and the glamour will

not always cast their spell. Stars will not always shine, for the stars are less than the firmament, but true actors will always hold their place.

In our stories, then, we shall continue to look in the future to human values, not in the abstract but in the concrete. As for their presentation, it is from the genius of our technicians in practise and near to life that we learn. The solutions to our problems must not be thought out, they must be *worked* out. To achieve this we must study the camera above all. The camera must live and move as if it were strapped to the pulse of humanity.

I see, hopefully, the public of the future understanding the flow of a story cinematographically.

But the greatest disadvantage of to-day, and one which the future must remove, is that of the one film for all.

No other art or craft is limited only to a choice of quality within the same kind or form. The day will come, and with it the solution of so many of our problems, when the range of choice will include subjects for every mental and emotional level, and the treatment of these will be equally varied.

Until then, dissensions in the camp will continue. But when that time arrives the humourist, remembering the past, will almost certainly laugh to see who goes where.

mirror writing: scenario and life: surrealist cinema

OSWELL BLAKESTON

Dr. Macdonald Critchley defined mirror writing as that variety of script which runs in an opposite direction to the normal, the individual letters being also reversed: thus the writing is illegible until held up before a looking glass. The phenomenon has been found among all classes of individuals ranging from the mentally defective to intellects of the highest order: the notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci were written mirror-wise, and so, often, is the planchette script of mediums. We read in the text-book: "The visual image impinging upon one occipital lobe is mirrored opposite of the image in the other hemisphere; in a normal subject one of these images becomes suppressed; in mirror writing the supremacy of one hemisphere does not occur."

And what does this mean for the film director? A study of the subject may suggest that it is important to consider which hemisphere of the brain is being stimulated by the cinematographic image which set of impressions tapped. There is now a fresh urgency for shots composed with lines directed towards the left (the right handed child directs, when drawing, profiles towards the left), for shots composed with lines and planes directed towards the right. So for the eerie film it might be rewarding to direct lines and planes towards the left, and attempt to tap the normally suppressed images of the stimulated hemisphere. And then there is the question of eye fatigue

in relation to the direction of orientated lines and planes in a composition: by alternately employing the left and right hemispheres of the brain (by means of short spells of conscious mirror writing) a worker doubled endurance, sleeping for only three hours out of twenty four.

2

Scenario and Life

It is five minutes to six: the scenario editor in the big studio presses a button: " Will you kindly ask Mr. X. to come to my office?" " I'm sorry, sir, he's gone home." Our good friend Mr. X. does not survive to repeat his experimental liberty very often. An author in a film studio must be at his desk by 9.30 a.m. and must not leave before 6 p.m.: of course if a film is in production he may be expected to stay around till 3 a.m.! Is it to be wondered that scenarists, imprisoned in their offices, lose touch with life, that their works become more and more artificial with each hour that lapses in dreary confinement?

Producers, supervisors, the world is your scenario department! Give your scenarists enough money to explore adventure for a year, and tell them to come back with three stories. What a bargain one full blooded story would be for the paltry living and travelling expenses of a year! If you don't trust your man to come back with the goods, why pick him?

3

The Automatic Cinema.

The surrealiste film offers the independent cineaste a marvellous field for experiment—there is not much possibility, in this field, of finding oneself in competition with Basil Dean! It is, too, the best training to work in automatic cinema (in the sense of automatic drawing and writing), for there is release from convention while ideas are not spoilt by the primness of afterthought. It is at least encouraging for the amateur to remember that he who works automatically must make something—if he goes on long enough! Here the amateur, armed with the word " budget ", may well interpose that the unchecked unconscious can grandly call for avalanches or Roman orgies. It is true that automatic cinema, for reasons of finance, should not be concerned with representational scenes—although Len Lye had the notion that artistes making tests might solve he economic problem of a new kind of short of the Four Marx Brother order (the hero with altered features in each sequence): but what would, in automatic cinema, be possible (remarkable, rewarding) would be to treat the screen as a cave, to make the first marks and see what happens. Cave drawings are impossible to relate to anything except a man drawing what wasn't on his mind, but must have been somewhere in it.

Footnote for Amateurs. Those who are interested in the idea of making tests into a new kind of film might be amused by a short illustration of the possibilities:—A man is walking down a road. He sees a friend in the distance. The man waves and proceeds to give an imitation of a paralytic.

A bent beggar, on the other side of the street, straightens himself and walks off smartly! A youth is knocking at a door in the road. A voice says," It's no good, she won't be home till six." The youth goes on knocking. He wants to know what time it will be six! And so on. Or, if this cross between a Cocteau joke and a Four Marx Brother poem is too much of a strain, a film of tests might be made from such small scenes as are enacted in the penny-in-the-slot theatres at the pier head (Execution of the Murdered, etcetera). Or, tests for lighting might be employed to fashion a short of what happens in the studio after it is shut for the night—the spotlight turning softly in the shadows to talk to the sun arc. Of course films of ideas can always be made in conveniently isolated sections: the man who passes on his bad luck which snowballs round the world until it returns to kill him, the hazards of a bridge game, the two men in a pub who move their beers across the checked table and the rest of the world that moves in chess rhythm. Well, it was Herbert Jones who wondered how, with the progress of mechanical transport, the sparrow was going to get his next meal!

the sub-title

ROBERT FAIRTHORNE

When ' Talkies ' first made themselves heard, the first comment made on expected changes in technique was that ' now we need not be bothered with sub-titles any more.' In fact this change did not really take place; the same old titles were there, but spoken instead of printed. Actually the sub-title, old or new, is not a sub-title at all, but a lump of literature, and the possibilities of genuine titling have been increased, not diminished, by the acoustic film. In this article some attempt will be made at the investigation of these possibilities.

The assumption that the camera as such is essential to the film has resulted in the neglect of phases of visual experience which are non-representational, that is, not based on the appearance of ' natural ' objects. When subjects arise which cannot economically be dealt with by representational images, resource is had to literature, which is essentially vocal, or to the spoken word itself. It is worth noticing that, although the spoken word is by far the most common and the most ancient form of non-representational symbolism, it is never used representationally in talking films. Probably, at the moment, it cannot be so used, for speech still implies a speaker, even on the wireless. The sub-title itself, as commonly understood, is generally a visual translation of the spoken words of an hypothetical lecturer, rather than the visual translation of the idea concerned.

Now the printed word is only one kind of a vast number of visual symbols in everyday use, but it is a very peculiar symbol. Not only does it stand for a sound,—the spoken word—but also, in a world saturated in print, for the idea which that sound symbolises. Thus by suitable manipulation it can be made to stand for either the idea direct, or for the spoken word, which

will be unconsciously ' voiced ' in the mind of the spectator. The importance of such an instrument in acoustic films is evident, as is the annoyance caused by its abuse.

The value of the printed word to the film cannot be estimated without some reference to its relation to language in general. It will then be seen that it is capable of separate existence in its own right.

Print is one extreme of typographical development, the other being mathematical notation. It consists, in the occident anyway. of the representation of sounds by purely arbitrary shapes, and arranging them so that those in the know can reproduce the spoken words intended. This process is known as Reading, and is very uncommon in adults. It is uncommon because, firstly it is in many cases frankly impossible, the number of phonetic symbols being inadequate ; secondly because of the extreme familiarity of the word shapes to a population whose experience is necessarily derived in the main from marks printed on paper. It is this second circumstance, familiarity with the word or phrase shapes, that has lead to the unpremeditated birth of a visual language.

Such an origin has resulted in cold shouldering by the respectable. The language of literature remains *a,* but not *the,* spoken language. A well balanced sentence is not, except in Chinese, a visually pleasing arrangement of marks on paper, but a sentence that sounds well when spoken.* So also is 'reading' based on this principle, the word groups are converted into the previously memorised word sounds. The type is used as a link between sound and sound. Most people vocalize, mentally at least, whilst reading. No wonder that the possibility of a visual language, let alone its actual existence, has been overlooked.

Now this does not alter the fact that the ' reading ' or recognition of printed words is essentially visual. The eye is the only organ employed, and the translation into sound is a secondary and later process. This is shown by the incredible ease and speed with which ones name can be picked out of a printed page without the interval necessary for mental vocalization. A collection of shapes has been presented to the eye, and one of them has been immediately *recognised.* What is more, its meaning has been immediately comprehended.

Evidently in the printed word lie latent a visual and a vocalized language, either of which may be developed from it by proper manipulation. In a film it is essential that there shall be no mental vocalization of verbal symbols on the screen, unless the acoustic part of the film has been made to fit in with it. In this case it is equally essential that there should be vocalization.

In ordinary reading the eye is ahead of vocalization. It sends the shape seen back to the brain to be voiced, and passes on to the next word group. The words which are being consciously read are not the words which are being seen. If the duration of the sub-title is too long,—and generally it

* The only direct appeals to the eye are such words as ' labour ' and ' Labour ', ' society ' and ' Society ', which have distinct meanings although phonetically identical. In the *presentation* of printed matter, however, visual considerations are usually paramount.

america's advanceguard

Dawn to Dawn
American independent film by Josef Berne

film poster

A consideration of pictorial publicity is hardly a primary concern of the student of film art; but that is no excuse for the present neglect of an important secondary matter. Under the régime of the old Avenue Pavilion, a real effort was made to introduce an intelligent film with worthwhile propaganda. Mabel Lapthorn was commissioned to do a number of posters for continental films which had been imported. There were immediate reprecussions in Wardour Street: Mabel Lapthorn was ordered to execute designs for several " good booking " features. Many film critics were delighted; because they realised that the standards of movie production could be influenced indirectly by a general heightening of the cultural value of everything connected with the exhibition of movies. However, when it was decided by the " Powers " to turn the Avenue Pavilion into a news-reel house, the artists who had grouped themselves around Stuart Davis lost their moral support. But the question has been neglected long enough. The cinema is ready for a new drive for better posters and better publicity matter.

The pictures reproduced here are photographic covers for a film synopsis, and were carried out by Mabel Lapthorn and Oswell Blakeston, during the Avenue Pavilion's happy days.

is far, far too long,—the eye will be at loss for a job the most of the time. But if the eye is permitted to pass straight on to the next event on the screen, there will be no sense of shock at a sub-title, except that caused by the sudden change of shape, and the enormous change in illumination on the screen. Both these factors are under the control of the director.

At the moment we are concerned with short verbal phrases in a non-literary context. Long sub-titles are hardly non-literary, unless special precautions are taken, for the mind, through long established habit, will always vocalize a block of printed matter too long to be taken in all at once. This difficulty can be overcome, as will be shown.

Defining a " unit sub-title " as one containing a word or phrase that can be appreciated literally ' at a glance ', it is possible to lay down the following principles of its use.

There is a certain interval required for the eye to recognise the shapes of words. If the screen action is immediately resumed after this interval the eye will have had no time to realize that it has been looking at curious geometrical shapes, and there will be no break in the flow of the film. It may be safely assumed that the mind will catch up with the eye very quickly.

If, on the contrary, the printed words remain on the screen longer than this interval, the eye will be unoccupied and the visual attention will wander. The lettering will have served its purpose and then will have become a visual corpse. The only way to prevent this is to make the actual geometry, duration, and possibly ' movement '* of the lettering as much a part of the film as any representational shot.

This kinetic manipulation will have to be considered in relation to the purpose of the title as well as to the flow of the neighbouring shots. It is not sufficiently realised that the film must be modified to suit the titles, just as the titles must be modified to suit the film.

If such adjustments have been made, it does not matter if the duration of the title is longer than that required to recognise the words. The lettering will have become part and parcel of the film. In the acoustic films—yet to be made—where mental vocalization by the audience is deliberately utilised, the duration will have to be comparatively long. In these days reading is so general that vocalization is, in the case of isolated phrases, merely an aura surrounding the fundamental process, and taking time to develop.

Something must be said on the intrinsic value of single word or single phrase sub-titles. A word by itself is as adaptable as any representational image, in fact more so, for it is less definite though as concrete. A word used in a literary phrase is already adapted to the structure of that phrase, which absorbs it, and the literary phrase is as congruous in a film as a display of pictures in a symphony. The shape 1914 has far greater calue than titles like " The Dread Dogs of War are Unleashed ", and probably more than shots of troops marching and of domestic partings. Besides its meaning a

* Movement, that is, change of position or shape, is a rather dangerous form of manipulation. Generally it tends to emphasise the shapes of words at the expense of their significance.

word has an emotional aura which is all the more potent for being implicit, and is therefore admirable for the introduction of overtones into the film.

Some care should be taken to avoid emotional puns; the overtonal significance of a unit sub-title is obviously a function of the individual spectator. The title "July 1st, 1916" would produce very different emotions in London and Belfast.

Very many of the usual continuity titles can be boiled down to one word, and can be improved by the process. Also so can many 'photographic' sequences, though such a practice is regarded as heresy. Unfortunately limits of space forbid quotation of examples in this article.

But not all titles, however pruned, can be converted into a single unit phrase. In such cases it is not possible, without turning the title into vocalized literature, to show the complete title all at once. The eye confronted with a block of printed matter will assume it to be literary, and the mind will thus proceed to vocalize it as the eye passes from section to section. The obvious remedy is to split up the title into distinct groups, and to distribute them in space or time. Here two dangers are to be avoided. If the title is split into groups distributed over the screen, the eye must pass from one to another to appreciate the total meaning. Thus some of the lettering must become 'dead' before the others have been read. Literal mortification is contagious, so to prevent a corpse strewn screen each group should be faded in turn after a calculated interval.

If the title is split in time, that is, distributed as a sequence of titles, the splitting must not be carried too far. A phrase split into component words is sometimes as meaningless as a word split into its component letters, or letters into their component shapes. The mind will have to store up a series of words, and then read them over mentally. Nearly always this will be a vocal process, for few people memorise word sequences visually. This objection might well become an asset in a properly constructed acoustic film.

The foregoing remarks apply more to titles as an adjunct to a film mainly representational. If the film should happen to be "typographical" in treatment, the frame of mind of the audience will be somewhat different, but the basic facts of the process of reading remain the same. Nor is there time to deal with the internal structure of the title, lettering, backgrounds (if any) type founts, kinetic manipulation, and so forth. The opportunities here for imparting visual or emotional texture are boundless.

genesis of the sound film

JOHN C. MOORE

The cinematic outlook of the average Englishman is strictly limited. He can be divided into two classes: those who take the criticisms of Mr. Hannen Swaffer as ultimate truth, and those who look upon the young Gods of the former Empire Marketing Board (now G.P.O.) as the saviours of the British film industry.

I hold no brief for either of them.

The documentary film can do as little without the commercial cinema as the latter can do without the experimentalists. The one without the aid of the other would cease to exist. For its artistic development the commercial films is dependent upon the experiments of the Avant Garde, while the intellectual film, for its expensive technical researches, must look to the wealthy studios for financial assistance, unless subsidised by the Government as in the U.S.S.R.

As an independent form of art both movements have failed to fulfil their promise. Only a fusion of the two will be able to save them in the long run; a blending of artistic merit and financial integrity. Or, in the words of G. W. Pabst, the famous director of *Kameradschaft* " Russia has taken one road and America has taken the opposite, but in a hundred years both will meet . . . . "

No study is of greater interest than the history of the cinema, in view of the fact that authorities do not agree as to who was the real inventor of the cinematograph. Any American will tell you it was Edison, while the French are equally certain that the palm of honour should be handed to the brothers Lumière. Germany, on the other hand, supports the claims of Max and Emil Skladanowski and Oskar Messter. But the real inventor may just as well have been Dickson, Jansen or Muybridge.

Records shew that in 1877 Thomas Alva Edison invented the phonograph, but that he was only interested in the cinematograph to the extent of optical accompaniment of his sound machine. Notwithstanding the fact that his hiscentoscope showed celluloid films of about 20 yards in length, his invention could hardly be called cinema in the proper sense of the word, as only one person could see the film at one time. Edison made no attempt to project the strips of celluloid onto a surface where they could be seen by a group of spectators simultaneously.

Although on 1st November 1895 Max and Emil Skladanowski had given a performance of moving pictures in the famous Berlin Wintergarden, and on 28th December of the same year the brothers Lumière had given a demonstration of their invention in the Grand Café on the Boulevard des Capucines, it was not until 1896 that the first model of a really faultlessly working cinema apparatus was made by the German Oskar Messter.

Many prominent people in the film world give credit for the invention either to the brother Skladanowski or Auguste and Luis Lumière, although personally I am inclined to favour Oskar Messter's claim, in view of the fact that the cinema apparatus of to-day has been developed upon the lines originated by Messter. The Skladanowski cinematograph was of a different type altogether, and only allowed for the display of eight film pictures per second and required two simultaneously running films. In those days what is technically called " The Maltese Cross", for conveying the film through the projecting apparatus, had not been invented, and the Skladanowski cinematograph could therefore only show short films portraying one single movement. The beginning and the end of the film were merely stuck together with the result that the film kept repeating itself ad infinitum. This, of

course, could hardly be called true cinema.

Those who believe that the sound film is only a recent invention, dating from the time when Al Jolson stormed the world with his *Singing Fool* will be surprised to hear that as early as 29th August 1903 a demonstration of a sound film was given in Germany. The results obtained with this apparatus were surprisingly good, the only thing that could not be achieved to perfection being the sound recording of large scale scenes, full of movement. Its chief drawback, however, was the intensification of sound value, for in those days the microphone for recording and the intensifier for reproduction were not yet known.

Contrary to the belief of many the sound film was not a revolution. Cinematographic movement, visual rhythm and optical interpretation serve the sound film as well as the silent one and artistic and technical developments remained. The talking picture has only added sound rhythm to the already existing cinematographic rhythm.

Some prominent people in the film world still lament the death of the silent film and condemn the sound picture for no specific reason whatsoever. Yet the sound film, as an independent form of art, carries in it greater possibilities than the silent film at its zenith, for it has rid itself of the subtitles. Above all, however, the film has become visual-audible.

The sound film to-day is still in its infancy; a commercial extravanganza that is just surviving an era of sound saturation. In short the producing companies have exploited talking resources to the full extent. Like the child which suddenly discovers that the teddy-bear, that it has considered dumb all its life, is delighted to find that it will squeak when you press its tail, so the film producers, those grown up children, were delighted too when they found out that the film, which they had considered silent all their lives, suddenly could produce sound. The result in both cases—the teddy-bear and the film—was disastrous. They were made to squeak continually!

But one day sound will take its modest necessary place in the constructive whole. Then we shall have progressed considerably.

the cinema to-day

We welcome suitable quotations for this section. Please state the name of the journals or individuals from whom they are obtained, if this is known, though not necessarily for publication.

* * * *

Cinema Advertisement:

SUPER SHOW
TWO HUGE ATTRACTIONS:
DISRAELI AND EIGHT GIRLS IN A BOAT AT THE PALACE

* * * *

From a report in *To-day's Cinema,* film trade paper:
"*Mothers of England*

A clarion call for purer films was sounded by the Duchess of Hamilton, distinguished flower of the English aristocracy, at a luncheon held yesterady under the aegis of the Women's International Film Association. . . .

She called for films with national ideas, the abolition of animal cruelty, bullfights, and fights to the death, or even cruelty to humans (!), films on the lives of great teachers, pictures based on history, more like " Little Women" .. Mrs. Sheldon Wilkinson, founder of the W.I.F.A. told her audience how once she heard a little voice saying:

' Mothers of England, go on: you are the people to make better pictures '. The luncheon was held at the Café de la Paix, Swallow Street, and was attended by an international gathering in which East met West, and eventually moved over to the Piccadilly news theatre to see a film about the Bishop of London ".

* * * *

From account in trade paper of activities of (George) Burns and (Gracie) Allen:

. . . . Meanwhile they have been putting in a spot of travelling. To hear Gracie (whose manner, apart from the " dizziness " is very similar to her screen style) talking about Russia I found very interesting, having visited that land of promise myself. Having been induced to go there on the recommendations of Paul Muni and Harpo Marx, they are now firmly of the opinion that it is the worst country on God's earth.

* * * *

From report in Indian film newspaper on Educational film experiments:

. . . . " The teacher must be careful to choose acceptable material. One class was unfortunate enough to witness a film in which ladies with their bosoms exposed were washing. It is, of course, essential that the teacher sees all films before they are shown to the children."

* * * *

At a press show. Two very " fashionable " individuals:

" My dear, what a divine figure!"

" Rot, my dear, I tell you she's padded. Look how she keeps looking down her dress to see if it's slipping ".

* * * *

From a report:

Colonel John Buchan, M.P., (at the inaugural dinner of the British Film Institute) who gave the health of " The Guests ", pointed out that the Institute included representatives not only of cinema and cultural interests, but also of " that great reservoir of good taste and good feeling which we call the general public ".

report

ROBERT FAIRTHORNE

(4th International Congress for Applied Mechanics, Cambridge, 1934)

An International Congress for Applied Mechanics may not appear to be a very promising field for film art, but it does at least show a use of the film dictated by the necessity for clear exposition alone. It is significant that, of the films shown at this Congress, those that had the least connection with normal cinematographic usage had the greatest connection with cinematographic art, and conversely. Thus the lectures of the two Watanabes, who remained in Tokio, although complete talking-films, were no more than glorified telegrams.

A little higher in (film) interest came the descriptive films, such as those of Perring and Coombes showing the take-off and landing of model seaplanes at the R. A. E. Tank. Although originally no more than a device for compelling Nature to jump through the hoop when required, the use of slow-motion to provide " close-ups in time ", and of similar devices which result in a screen world more plastic than the natural, make these films interesting and independent confirmations of Pudovkin's theories on the subject.

Of the descriptive or record films, one transcended itself by creating what is no doubt new visual experience. This was the extraordinary film of Townend which, by stroboscopic spark photography, demonstrated the flow of air through pipes. Shown as a so-called " abstract film " it would prove a great success. But far more important is the fact that here we have a direct visual representation of events which are themselves essentially non-visual. Till now this has been the prerogative of the printed word.

Curiously enough, those lectures which employed no films at all managed to throw light on the problem of dialogue in acoustic films. Speaking in languages foreign to themselves or to their audiences, lecturers were compelled to rely on diagrams, and an occasionally comprehended word or phrase, to make themselves clear. In this they were astonishingly successful, and those who, with every justification, think the spoken word an acoustic form of conveying ideas too valuable to be thrown away, would be well advised to try the effect of occasional *single* words in place of " dialogue ".

Hearty appreciation is due to Dr. Lomonossof who, in a lecture on the dynamics of the railway train, succeeded in presenting the clearest and most legible diagrams and mathematical equations of any author at the Congress. These resembled, in lettering and colour scheme, the *decor* of the Chauve Souris. Will educational experts and *Sight and Sound* please note?

a "star" on her work

ELISSA LANDI, Mercedes in the United Artist's production *Count of Monte Cristo* gives her opinion of the part.

The character of Mercedes is an interesting one to portray. First of all, I enjoy it because in *The Count of Monte Cristo,* there arises an opportunity really to experiment with my appearance and to guess at what age will do to my face and even to my personality. I never before played the part of a woman in early middle-age on the screen.

All " first times " are fun in acting; one's first comedy role, one's first emotional role, one's first temperamental role, and so forth. This one, in the later sequences of the picture, is my first mother-role—and as such is one of the most exciting I have done.

Quite frankly, I am not portraying Alexandre Dumas' Mercedes. In my humble opinion, there never was one! What I mean is, that I have never believed even in the existence of Dumas' sweet women, his heroines. Only his doubtful ladies and his villainesses are of flesh and blood. They live. In the " Three Musketeers " the wicked Milady de Winter is a definite character, whereas Constance Bonaucieux is not. She is a carelessly sketched, sweet, stock victim. So is Mercedes of the novel *Monte Cristo*—a helpless and somewhat sugary victim. In the picture script, however, because the public of today has little patience with such women, and to lend veracity and romance to the situations between Dantes and Mercedes, the character has been endowed with a quiet strength and steadfastness lacking in Dumas heroine. The heroism and integrity of the screen play Mercedes are refreshing qualities to bring to life, and the problem of keeping a " good " woman interesting in times when " goodness " and " dullness " have become almost synonymous. She holds a peculiar fascination for me. I'm trying to prevent her from being a dull " goody ". I hope I am successful. Personally, I don't think genuinely good people are ever really dull. They are too rare to be dull. I do think, though, that dull people are often good—negatively good. And that's where the trouble lies; the public receives a false impression of goodness. I don't find Mercedes dull. No woman of fortitude and loyalty is uninteresting. Those two virtues were ever at a premium, and as such are always worth studying.

negro and film

JOHN BANTING

and a reply from IRENE NICHOLSON

A long letter, which unfortunately we have not space to quote entire, comes from John Banting, Chapelle-Rèanville, Eure, France. He criticises Irene Nicholson's review of *Emperor Jones.* His chief causes for complain are:

(a) that " nigger " is " a term of derision and contempt for the Negro race ".

(b) " that Africans were imported into America in the eighteenth century, so that, what with several generations of inforced (sic) western custom and inforced western

inter-breeding . . . it would indeed be striving if American Negroes . . . attempted to be *African*!" (italics his).

(c) that stone breaking in a chain gang was called a " freer occupation for a giant than blacking boots or shooting crapps."

Miss Nicholson's reply:

I must thank Mr. Banting for his letter. It is entirely my fault that he has misinterpreted my review, and I apologise. I can assure him that I have no prejudices (race or other) against the Negroes. I used the word " nigger " with full realisation of its implication (I have lived six years of my life in New York, where feeling against the race is perhaps strongest) but with complete disregard for the absurd colour consciousness of black and white alike. I wrongly supposed that the context would make it obvious that my feelings towards the Negro were quite unprejudiced.

I am well aware that the Negroes have been in America for some two centuries and have intermarried. I am equally aware, as Paul Robeson seems not to be when he talks of Negro art being the real art of America, that they came originally from Africa, and that two centuries is very, very little in a tradition of thousands. Any Negro who merits the name, however much white blood there is in him, is still more than 50% Negro, if only by definition. Negroes, in spite of their gradual admixture with civilisation and the whites, are still born for reality. They should, on the whole, leave artificiality to those who can better cope with it. I do not mean that they should keep out of the universities and professions, but that, if they go into them, they should take with them their naturally direct and simple vision. Admittedly this is difficult, for methods of diplomacy and concealment will be thrust upon them by their colleagues. But just as their own fists are still more natural to them in a fight than any words, or, on the other hand, poison gas, so they might do a service to civilisation by ignoring its methods and going straight to the visual issues.

In drawing attention to the pure physical action in the stone-breaking, I thought I had made it clear that only the action itself, not the circumstances in which it was performed, was a freer occupation for a giant than blacking boots etc. The Emperor Jones is one of many Negroes who fail to see that they are too large and strong and (thank goodness) too direct and simple, to fit into metropolitan life with its petty issues and ulterior motives. My " in spite of blows and shackles " was perhaps misleading. I meant only to impress the great difference between the reality of stone-breaking and the artificiality of blacking boots and shooting crapps.

teaching film in russia

MARIE SETON

After the Bolshevik revolution, Russian youth, and in particular the provincials, turned to the Arts as a means of expression. The theatre and the developing art of cinema attracted them, primarily because art was concerned with giving formal expression to actuality. In giving artistic form to immediate history, the young Russians felt themeselves to be directly in touch with the essence of revolutionary life and thought. The next best thing to having fought in the Red Army was to recreate some battle for the screen. It was an age of epic sentiments, for youth had newly come to victory, and to quote Meyerhold, ' Art is class-art ' and ' the theatre (the cinema too) the tribune of agitation '. If one can judge by those representative of that time, Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Ester Schub, Boris Barnet and a dozen others, they used the cinema as a means of destroying the old world, not from an enforced political principle, but because they had learnt to hate it from intimate contact.

This rush to create the modern world in terms of art has gradually lessened. The reason is to be found in the increase of constructive occupations; for every student of theatre and cinema today there are several thousands studying aviation or engineering.

"There are more important things than Art." Eisenstein said to me recently. "Today I wish I were an architect or engineer, in order to construct a more immediately important life in the Far East or the South Caucasus."

Certainly, Moscow is not the new world; it is a conglomeration of centuries overlaid with Soviet ideology. The old and the new jossle one another, whereas, in the districts undeveloped in Tzarist days, everything on the face of the earth has been raised by Soviet endeavour. It is this endeavour which has sent students of minority races, Armenian, Georgian, Uzebeck, Tartar, to the State Institute of Cinematography in Moscow to study under Eisenstein. More than fifty per cent of these students speak Russian imperfectly and possess only the most primitive culture and rudimentary knowledge of art. Working with Eisenstein is their first (and probably their greatest) intellectual exercise and adventure.

"Half of them don't understand my psychology," Eisenstein said, and regretfully admitted, "and I don't understand half of theirs."

Just as the old architecture jossles the new in the streets of Moscow, so in the technicum, Eisenstein, with his heterogeneous training and culture,—an intellectual background which is a bridge between the Tzarist and the Bolshevik world,—is working with students who are far more typical of the new social system than he can ever be. Their effect upon him is probably as great as the one he makes upon them.

"In return for the materialism they give us, (the pioneers of revolutionary art) we must give them the best of our knowledge. They have none of our hate for the old, they are really not particularly interested.

That remark throws considerable light upon the latest Soviet films, many of which tend towards comedy.

Eisenstein's principal of teaching is to leave as much to the imagination of his students as possible; in order that they should express their point of view rather than his. He suggests a theme, and leaves them to select the juxtaposition of character, period and place. In fact he leaves them a very long rope to hang themselves, for woe betide if their choice and explanation is illogical, or their criticism superficial. But more of this anon.

For example, Eisenstein will give the students the opening passage of a scenario.

'A man returns from the war and finds that his wife has a child of which he is not the father. He leaves her immediately.'

There is nothing original in the theme, the theme is older than Hollywood.

Eisenstein's group work upon this skeleton; the mise-en-scene is the first step. The students must discover the most effective positions and the subsequent movements for themselves through logical deductions.

"Why the woman should move the chair in that way; turn her face in this way. Why she makes the movement of starting back before going forward. We analyse fear."

Eisenstein got up from his desk, and moved about the small space in his room not occupied by piles of books (soon one will have to push ones way into this room and there discover him sitting in the centre of the last square foot, a box of chocolates on one side, and the vast manuscript of his book on the other. Nothing will be visible but his enormous head.)

"Fear," he continued, moving backwards and forwards "to advance towards from attraction. To remain stationary, unable to move,—being pulled both ways."

He sat down again.

"We first work the scene on paper, then on the floor. The next development is the camera and its angle; the long shot, the close-up, etc. And last of all montage."

Montage, the whole crux of the Eisenstein method.

"Montage did not appear with the film; it is the dialectical development. Montage in architecture; montage in painting. Think of Memlin, Picasso and the Impressionists. And then the cinema,—it develops out of the theatre, hence I deal with theatre-cinema . . . But come to GIK to-morrow and see for yourself . . . And don't forget, give Alexandrov the pyjamas, and give me the chocolates . . . .

To be continued.

church! sex! films!

One morning in the headlines of the "Daily Express" I see: "POPE FIGHTS SEX FILMS: League of Decency formed."

Nobody knows better than critics how much reform is needed. But how is the Church to set about it? and have they not learnt their lesson from the Index, upon which every money-grubbing author longs to read his name?

"There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so." Thinking on the part of whom? The director very often; and then you can insist that he clothe his heroines in flannel petticoats and the vapours, but still the not nice thought will come through. Or perhaps it is the audience that falters. By controlling what the audience shall see one does not control what it shall think.

Then, dare one suggest it? there is the mind of the censor himself. By whose thoughts were "Ulysses" and "Green Pastures" banned while "The Green Hat" and "While Parents Sleep" are allowed? Will the new Index ban "Extase" and "Potemkin" and let "The Song of Songs" and "Sailors Don't Care" pass

The press was once harangued as the film is now; and remember "I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue." Most virtues, in spite of Milton, are fugitive still, which accounts for their underground pallour.

I. N.

german film note

The contents of Eisenstein's letter to Dr. Goebbels, published in this number, are echoed in a note in the film trade paper " To-Day's Cinema ' (Thursday August 16 1934):

. . . . " Once Germany was a leader of the film art, producer of some of the greatest masterpieces of the screen. Its studios were proud in the possession and allegiance of men whose creative genius helped to the maturity and power it owns to-day. German films meant great films. Then you (i.e. the Nazis) came. You came, and with a narrow, fanatical, anti-racial, anti-realigious zeal, persecuted those whom you decided must be your enemies. You earned a name for bludgeoning and bloodshed. Your name began to stink in the minds of decent folk. The brains that had made your industry either left you or were driven out, victims of a mean and inhuman persecution. The great German industry became a propagandist puppetry, run by incompetent and inefficient marionettes. Its productions, once artistic masterpieces, became pictorial pamphlets in favour of anti-Semitisma and the knout.

And the only reasons you can see for the unwillingness of the world to be loaded with such cinematic nauseation is Jewish boycotry and world depression. You make us laugh!

But our laughter, alas, is lost in the tears of your victims."

book review

THE CENSOR, THE DRAMA AND THE FILM 1900-1934—by Dorothy Knowles. (George Allen and Unwin Ltd. 7s. 6d.)

A comprehensive survey of the damage done by the Censor to stage and screen. The unofficial character of film censorship leads to the depressing conclusion that, so long as society is afraid of itself, Censorship is inevitable. This list of banned works shows the present Censorship to be both obsolete and ineffectual (most of the works have been shown to groups and many have been published).

The book might have contained more thought, but the facts speak, if not against Censorship as an ideal, at least against the present system.

cinema america

HERMAN G. WEINBERG

I was surprised to note that " film-art No. 4 " reviewed an abbreviated version of Eisenstein's lovely and poetic sound film experiment, *Romance Sentimentale*. Why those who released the film in England should have curtailed its length from twenty minutes to seven minutes, Wardour Street and the Gods only know, because in its original form it was one of the most complete and perfect expressions of the artist working in his medium that has yet been vouchsafed us.

In frenetic photography, Tisse has caught Eisenstein's many moods in sketching a sad autumn day, that begins with a storm, goes through a hushed and almost spiritual calm, to a jubilant finish. A girl at a piano sings a melancholy Russian love song, in the twilight dusk, after the storm. Outside, in the quiet evening, nature weeps. Then the mist rises. A star crackles in the fireplace and whirls up into the sky as the music goes into a passionate and joyous waltz rhythm—and then, in a series of dazzling vistas containing some of the most subtle cutting and overtonal montage the screen has yet known, swans flutter and settle down into the lake, stars burst, Rodin's *The Kiss* emerges as the adorable symbolic group it is, heaven and earth unite in a paen of song, fire and smoke—and through it all the turbulent, rushing water . . . the next morning—sunlight in a luxuriant cornfield, with the girl at a white piano, once again singing the jubilant chorus while a flock of doves flutter away, speeding the bright clear morning on its way . . . .

In Paris when *Romance Sentimentale* was first shown, Eisenstein's admirers were in an uproar on the grounds that he had gone " effete " on them. However this may be, the result most eminently and nobly justified the idea. Eisenstein himself called the film " un etude cinematographique ", and, as such, it is very nearly perfect. There are those who claim that he made it " tongue in cheek." When asked the significance of the white piano in the cornfield, Eisenstein replied, with a sly twinkle, " If science can have its white mice, the cinema can have its white pianos."

All of which does not prevent *Romance Sentimentale* from being the first absolute sound film and tribute to the genius of the man who is, doubtless, the first true poet of the films.

Note:—The first time we screened this film in New York, we looked at the first two or three hundred feet before we realized the film was threaded in the projector backwards! (Since the part numbers were in French, the operator could not tell *Premiere Partie* from *Fin de Premiere Partie*—altho' he did guess that *premiere* might be *first*.) Someone exclaimed, " At last, a picture that is as good backwards as forwards!"

The American film company (Principal Pictures) which undertook the unholy task of sponsoring and distributing *Thunder over Mexico* has begun the thankless task of evolving a number of short films from the " left-over " footage of " *Que Viva Mexico* "! The report goes that they " expect the

complete negative, which they own, to supply more pictures (features) in the years to come." Not a bad bargain from a business point of view— to get several features and innumerable shorts for the price of one feature . . . The first short film will be *Death Day* " depicting the religious customs of the Mexican Indians ". The other two are travelogues of the Tehuantepic country, for which Walter Anthony will write the accompanying narrative (off screen voice). Followers of such things will remember that Walter Anthony is a past master and specialist in the newly risen art of gilding the lily. Universal Pictures elected him to the task of writing the captions for *The Last Laugh,* when it was thought that Murnau's film would be unintelligible without titles.

Apropos *Thunder over Mexico,* the reverberations anent the wholesale desecration of what would have been Eisenstein's masterpiece, have pretty much quieted down, tho' it left an ache, an empty void of futility and heartbreak. A faint rumbling from Mexico City was encouraging, however. Exhibition of *Thunder over Mexico* was blocked for an indefinite period in Mexico City, even tho' the local censors passed it. The showing was held up by the Cinema Employees Union of Mexico City which did not like Hollywood's editing of the picture. The film was announced to be the *piece-de-resistance* for the debut of the Teatro Principal, opening as a cinema house after 200 years of stage shows only. The Union's stubborn opposition caused the film to be " pulled out " at the last minute and the theatre has started its cinema career as a second-run house.

The first Nazi film, *S.A. Mann-Brand,* finally found a theatre brave enough to show it, in the heart of the German colony of New York. It is billed: " America, see the FACTS—The TRUTH! First 100% NAZI German Picture—over 100,000,000 people in Europe have seen and re-seen it! Third Big Week!" It is, no doubt, drawing the curious as well as the sympathizers and not having been on the scene of the crime, the writer cannot report the mixed reaction such a film is bound to cause.

Ironically enough, Pudovkin's *Mother,* after a long suppression, is finally showing in New York, simultaneously with *S.A. Mann-Brand,* but some two or three miles removed in a little theatre devoted to Communist films exclusively. An attempt has been made to bring it up to date. Michael Gold (one of the editors of *The New Masses*) wrote an accompanying off-screen voice narrative (a peculiarly American institution, by the way, this off-screen voice) underlining the film's revolutionary thesis, and workers songs, marches, etc. have been grafted on, to give it the appearance of a sound film. It is less effective than as a silent film and one wonders what the late Edmund Meisel could have achieved with such a score as he wrote for *Potemkin.* In any case, the film holds up well, all things considered, tho' the lighting and photography is considerably dated. The great moments of universal truth are still great, however, and this is all that matters in such a film that was once (and may still be) a sacred cow among cinemas. It is drawing throngs.

America with the sudden rush of navy propaganda in the newsreels and *Stand Up and Cheer* (not to mention the insidious *No Greater Glory*) has gone imperialist in a big way.

For the first time in a long period, the Pathe News came out with the most flagrant war propaganda seen on the screen since the newsreels of 1917-18. This issue was prepared with the assistance of the Navy League and was planned for release in 2662 theatres throughout the country one week before the gigantic United States Battle Fleet Review in New York Harbour, and at a time when disarmament and re-armament is the subject of considerable international discussion. Accompanied by a specially prepared off-screen voice narrative (there it is again), both patriotic and instructive, it compares in the most jingoistic fashion the relative degrees of strength between the American Navy and the navies of foreign powers. " We have a tonnage of 3 to 5 compared with Great Britain . . . even less than Japan . . . about 3 to 4 . . . It is our responsibility as a nation to give our officers and men a treaty navy of modern ships, fully manned . . . that is, aircraft carriers, cruisers, destroyers and submarines, not over age . . . Our Navy is for one purpose only . . . to protect America. Keep it fit to fight!" Thus runs the narrative, in part. A few applaud as the stars and stripes unfurl, superimposed on the sleek prows of a row of dreadnaughts cleaving the waves . . . others watch in silence . . .

Stand Up and Cheer (Fox) was frankly made as pure unadulterated propaganda under the impression that if you shout and sing and march with enough exuberance you can convince the great mass of people that the depression is over and that the diplomats in Washington have only the welfare of the people at heart. This premise is worked out by instituting a Department of Entertainment, wherein thousands and thousands of vaudeville acts will be sent out all through the country to cheer up the people. The film ends with a " grand march " of the various and sundry strata of American society, policemen, firemen, mailmen, stenographers, factory workers, farmers, white collar clerks, etc. marching down a triumphal way into a " new life ". No film was ever further from the truth than this one and few have been as insidious. (Rumour has it that it was made in tacit co-operation with the government and that its first showing at Radio City in New York was held over for a second week even though the attendance did by no means warrant it—the theatre having lost about $50,000.00 on the second week's engagement).

No Greater Glory, adapted from Molnar's *The Paul Street Boys,* has already had a campaign of vilification started against it (and rightly) by the workers Film and Photo League. Masquerading as an anti-war document, it is the most flagrantly fascist film to be made here thus far. Columbia Pictures are the producers—and that " artistical " director, Frank Borzage, is responsible for its poisonous slop.

The " No Greater Glory " in the film is that " it is no greater glory than to die for one's country." The struggle for the possession of an empty city lot between two factions of boys—the Red Shirts (the villians—and hence the Communistic alliteration) and the Blue Shirts (the heroes—there is a Blue Shirt Organization in America), with all the hollow parahernalia of Nazi saluting, clicking heels, sharp orders, blind obedience and all the fol-de-rol that goes to make juveniles aping insane military tactics odious, are all

present in disordered, disconcerting array. *No Greater Glory* is the kind of film that would go over big in Germany today. Some one should bring it to the attention of Goebbels so that he can learn that instead of wasting breath seeking a Nazi counterpart of a *Potemkin* in the German film studios, he has co-workers in America (and elsewhere, I daresay) doing just the sort of thing he wants.

comment

London's four worthwhile cinemas, The Forum, Villiers Street, The Curzon, Mayfair, The Academy, Oxford Street, and the Everyman, Hampstead, have all been presenting programmes which, at times, have been notable.
Dawn to Dawn, All Quiet on the Western Front, Birth of a Nation are a few of the Forum's good presentations.
La Crise est Fini, Crime without Passion, Caravan have been shown by the Curzon and, at the time of writing, Uckicky's *Refugees* (reviewed in a past *film art*) is due.
Ces Messieurs de la Sante and *Le Dernier Milliardaire* are presentations from the Academy, while their Autumn and Winter list promises several interesting films from France, Sweden and Czechoslovakia.
The Everyman have shown many of the above films, and a thing worth noting in their policy is the presentation of good ' shorts "—and not just ' shorts ' to fill up space. They are one of the few cinemas in existence who do this.
Another cinema worthy of mention is the Tatler, Charing Cross Road, not so much for the films shown but for the ideas and ideals of the manager Mr. Broom, who if he had his own way would probably be running something like the old Avenue Pavilion or Studio 28. As it is he gets hold of most good ' shorts ' available, and also shows Andrew Buchanan's cinemagazine as it appears.

A series of four articles on such subjects as Film and Ballet, Film and Theatre, etc. by Irene Nicholson have been published in the review *Time and Tide*.
Film societies and cinemas desiring to show the *film art group* production *Beyond This Open Road* should get in touch with the renters, The Film Society, 56 Manchester Street, London, W.1. from whom it may be obtained.

Readers desiring to insert notices, announcements, etc. in these pages should send them in at their earliest convenience and remember to make them as compact as possible. If by inserting such notes in these columns, we can help any readers we shall be very pleased to do so.

We apologise for the announcement in the last number to the effect that Moholy-Nagy, Arthur Elton, would be writing. It is extremely difficult to know exactly what is to be published, in advance. But we can assure readers that all names previously announced will definitely appear in numbers sooner or later.

films i want to see

It almost breaks one's heart to think that, stored away in some obscure vault, are films like these.

I want to see:

Karl Dreyer's *Vampyr* (promised a year or so ago by the Academy Cinema, London)—a film by the man who made the great cinematic piece *Jeanne D'Arc* . . . a film based on the effects of psycho-analysis . . . and said to be superb for its rendering of the subconscious and unconscious mind, and in its representation of eerieness.

I want to see:

Boris Barnet's *Suburbia* . . . which Paris has seen . . . and which, according to reports, contains brilliant material and is devastating in its condemnation and exposition of war.

I want to see:

L'Homme a L'Hispano by Jean Epstein . . . the man who made *Finis Terrae* and *Mor-Vran,* doing a society comedy! . . . But not forgetting that telegraph poles and lighthouses are very cinematic!

I want to see:

Erotik, a Czechoslovakian film (silent) by Machaty . . . of which reports sounded most promising.

I want to see:

Ivan by Dovshenko . . . after seeing the stills and reading the reviews, there is no reason to say why.

I want to see:

Jazz-Comedy by Alexandrov . . . with Torgsin Babies (Soviet Blonde Bombshells), and film cut to music.

AND

I WANT RE-ISSUED

The Fall of the House of Usher, by Epstein, *Chien Andalou, Coquille et le Clergyman* by Dullac, *Opus* 1, 2, 3, 4 by Ruttmann, *Wedding March* by Stroheim, *Docks of New York* by Sternberg, *Le Sang d'un Poete* by Cocteau, *Dracula* by Murnau, *Metropolis* by Lang, *Spy* by Lang, *End of the World* by Gance, *Finis Terrae* by Epstein, *L'Age D'or* by Bunel, *Le Tour* by Clair, *Week-End* by Ruttmann, *Bed and Sofa* by Room, *The Ghost that Never Returns* by Room and so on and so on and so on.
Will they ever be seen again? or are they to stagnate until their celluloid is used for boot leather?*

* apparently the fate of many old films.

the idea : l'idee : die idee

THOROLD DICKINSON

Berthold Bartosch, of Bohemian nationality but living in Paris, has made probably the first "trick" film with a serious theme. The actions of articulated two-dimensional figures, varying from white to black through all degrees of grey, against backgrounds at different levels, giving depth to the scenes, are used to convey human values. This is an original and important development of expression in a celluloid medium. Masereel's wood-cuts "DIE IDEE" provided the first plan for a film which developed on another conception in the course of being made.

BEYOND THIS OPEN ROAD

Rough advance stills from the first *f a* production

BEYOND THIS OPEN ROAD, a symphonic treatment of the open-air. Direction: B. VIVIAN BRAUN and IRENE NICHOLSON.

Photography: B. VIVIAN BRAUN
First presented at the Film Society in November, 1934.

america's "big" independent

Crime Without Passion
Direction: Ben Hecht and
Charles MacArthur
Photography: Lee Garmes

In this, his first complete film, Bartosch has represented the creation of an idealistic IDEA, any realisation of a creator, symbolised by the figure of a woman, and has shown the effect on humanity of to-day when it is faced with an ideal. The rich fear the aspect of truth which threatens to disturb and dissolve their complacence; the poor, restricted by poverty to a robot mentality become equally bound and without vision.

The history of the film is interesting and important as there exists confusion as to the authorship. In the autumn of 1930 Frans Masereel and Bartosch met in Berlin and a collaboration was suggested to produce an animated version of Masereel's wood-cuts " DIE IDEE ". Masereel was to make the components for such a trick film—figures, decor etc.—and Bartosch was to manipulate the figures and do the photography. This collaboration did not materialise and Bartosch started doing the whole job himself, attempting to follow the book exactly. After some weeks work he found the transposing of the static medium directly into a flexible medium impossible, so he scrapped what he had done and began afresh, working now from his own conception of the *basic* inspiration of the book and aided by the technical devices which he had evolved during his first experiment. He discussed these developments with Masereel, as he still considered it a ' Masereel ' film. At this period, spring 1931, Masereel made some sketches for decor and figures, but in the summer he was away, during which time Bartosch continued work, seeing more and more that he must re-shape his scenario; and so he came to add to the theme a meaning beyond that given to " DIE IDEE " by Masereel, and to work entirely independently. Masereel visited him from time to time, but there was no further collaboration. The silent version of the film was finished in the summer of 1932.

The film bears traces of the wood-cut influence, but the universality added by Bartosch, with the essential difference between the mediums, has produced a work which grew from the basic idea of Masereel's book into an entirely new artistic realisation. A comparison of the book and the film provides the evidence of the extent of the divergence between the two conceptions.

The music by Honegger written for this film, in 1934, interprets its spirit with great sensibility. In the orchestra, Honegger employs Martinot's new instrument, similar to a theremin, which is manipulated by the movement of the hands about an electrically charged rod. This sound achieves the same emotional effect musically as Bartosch gives visually with the figure-ideal, whose appearance is always announced and accompanied by this limpid instrument.

Bartosch is now making a film of his own conception which promises to be yet wider in scope and more original in technique than THE IDEA. The music will again be composed and directed by Honegger.

The film, THE IDEA, shown at the Tivoli on December 16th. by the Film Society.

company to distribute foreign films

It is interesting to hear of the formation of a new renting organization Reunion Films Ltd., formed to introduce and distribute the best continental pictures to Great Britain. The managing director is Victor Creer who, with Peter Witt acting as foreign manager has secured what are considered by some the best pictures of the moment. These include MASKERADE. The director is Willy Forst who made Unfinished Symphony, and the " star " is Paula Wesseley, whose reputation on the Continent is as big as Bergner, and Adolf Wohlbruck.

MASKERADE is a story of pre-war Vienna. In scenes of a first night of Rigoletto at the State Opera House, Caruso is actually seen and heard singing in the title role. Although dead many years, Caruso makes his film debut by means of a new technical achievement.

Victor Creer's aim is to create a market for these pictures throughout the country and to this end has established branches of his company in eight principle towns. After all not so many years ago continental pictures played in most cinemas as a matter of course. It is only the coming of " talkies " that has stopped this. But the language difficulty is successfully overcome by sub-titles by means of which most European countries see English and American films. The vast population of these countries have no objection, so why should we?

Reunion Films' first London release will be Young Love (Reka) at the Academy W.1. at Christmas. This film was made in Czechoslovakia and tied for the first prize with Man of Aran at the Venice Film Festival.

Reunion's third film MARIE Hungarian Legend with Annabella goes to the Forum Villiers Street, on the 13th of January.

Reunion Films has a further number of big films whose titles will be announced shortly. It is hoped to include stills of some of these pictures in the next number of *film art*.

film art

REVIEW SECTION

(London West End Presentations, General Releases, Films not yet shown in England, Films showing only abroad.)

CRIME WITHOUT PASSION

Charles Mac Arthur-Ben Hecht Production
Presented by Paramount Films
Direction: Charles MacArthur and Ben Hecht
Photography: Lee Garmes
With 'Margo', Claude Rains, etc.

An example of the best type of American film, and at that only fairly good. *Crime Without Passion* (an excellent title) is film-short-story. Unfortunately, dialogue is in excess, and it becomes excellent (almost perfect) talking film, not sound film. The distinction is important, and in fact the whole basis of sound plus picture. The camerawork and acting here are of highest standard, though the glamorous pseudo-artistic lighting in certain scenes is sick-making. But, particularly as an example of the directing and controlling of actors, *Crime Without Passion* is very notable. Cinema assumes its own rights when Margo is telephoning of suicide, and a shot of the courtyard below is cut in. The words are just superfluous, the picture is the thing. As it should be.

B. V. B.

DAWN TO DAWN

Directed by Josef Berne,
Music by Cameron MacPherson,
Continuity by Seymour Stern.

A lyrical piece of cinema aptly reviewed by H. G. Weinberg in *film art* 4. Its English premiere (at the Forum Cinema, London) brings it once more to mind. It is pure simple cinema. The camerawork, the cutting, the assistance (*not* acting, film acting as known is a fallacy; the actor is the director's tool, to be manipulated by him. Not a person to be glorified by meaningless camera-work, and scenes that are left on while the audience has a good look) of Julie Hayden make this film a reminder that somewhere in America are individuals capable of producing lovely works of film art.

B. V. B.

LITTLE MAN, WHAT NOW?

direction: FRANK BORZAGE.

UNIVERSAL production (novel by HANS FALLADA)

A prefatory note informs that the little man is everyman. This is a necessary precaution, for the conventional happy ending might conceal from the less wakeful that the problem remains unanswered: not only for the " marcher " with the black eye, and the riling communist, but for the little man himself; it is not only a job that makes life certain.

The film proposes no solution but merely sets the question. It is sentimental where it should be logical, particular where it should be general. But at least it is not presumptuous enough to think that any one faction knows the whole answer. It gives the film world something to think about, even has a knock at the film " star " himself. The presentation is straightforward, and I imagine follows the book closely. Margaret Sullavan's face is sensitive and her voice has depth if not breadth of expression. The story is not fitted to the cast but the cast to the story; which accounts for the lack of " star "-exploitation and the " realness " of the whole production. Realism nowadays means distortion if not perversion. This film is unique in its particulars. But the horrors of unemployment for the white-collar men, who have been used to modest luxuries and cannot even obtain necessities, these are neither exaggerated nor avoided. Film is beginning to present the truth.

I. N.

BLACK MAGIC

directed by Friedrich Dalschein

" A slice of native life ", as the posters had it; forewarning, generally, of spectacle and daring which pale before the rhetoric of superlative commentators. *Black Magic* is a simple treatment of the traditionally ornate theme.

There is restraint in selection. The routine of rice planting is shown, the old men on their doorsteps, the sport of cock fighting (on which they gamble as we on the races), trials through illness, art and religion in dance and ritual.

There is restraint in the treatment, which cuts in the reactions of the audience and leaves out the mauled cocks, which lets two dancers suffice for the usual multitudes, which adds no florid commentary but lets the native voices babble unintelligibly on (interpreted, where the story demands, by titles). Only for a few moments does the admirable cutting lapse into superimposition, and then perhaps pardonably—though it is the least comprehensible of cinema traditions that all dreams, reveries etc. should be shown in a photographic jumble. Surely memory, which strips a scene of all but its essentials, is more vivid than present reality.

The director has come perhaps as near to this eastern community as a westerner can. An interpretation from within would yield, one imagines, an entirely different technique, fluid rather than climatic. As a travel film (the very thin story might have been omitted) *Black Magic* sets a standard within the reach of every director, but alas, how seldom approximated.

I. N.

A MODERN HERO

by G. W. Pabst
(made in Hollywood)

It is inconceivable from any way of thinking that the Pabst who made *Jeanne Ney, Joyless Street, Kameradschaft* and *Dreigroschenoper,* could have had anything to do with the routine piece of banality, *A Modern Hero,* so like ten dozen other Hollywood film operas. Yet the main title carries his name as director. It is not only the most commonplace movie stuff, but so listless and uninspired as to beg the question whether Pabst really had anything to do with it. What happened I don't profess to know. Perhaps Warners were just being courteous and let Pabst officiate as director on a picture which already lined up an impossible scenario and the usual flock of studio supervisors. Add to this a cast of Hollywooden stock figures with the wooden Barthelmess as the hero and you have a sum total of some of the possible obstacles which Pabst must have faced.

The story, a sort of diluted *Bel-Ami,* of a man who uses influential women to climb the ladder of success only to have his world come crashing down his ears, does not help any. It is curious to note that when Warners asked Nero Films in Germany to turn out a quota film for them, Pabst was commissioned to make that film which turned out to be *"Die Dreigroschenoper"*, probably the most brilliant and maturely conceived of all cinema satires. Yet, when Warners commissions Pabst to make a film for them on their home grounds the result is such a piece of *hanswurst* as *"A Modern Hero"*. An article that would be worth reading, and which would illumine a great deal that is now shrouded in darkness, would be a statement from Pabst himself as to WHAT HAPPENED.

For surely SOMETHING DID HAPPEN!

H. G. Weinberg.

ARE YOU A MASON?

UNIVERSAL (British) production.

I would submit this as the typical English film. Robertson Hare, Sonnie Hale, " cads of the English cinema ", and other names familiar to those who know English films.

Dialogue, DIALOGUE, witty (sometimes) dialogue, and a little more dialogue. Neat situations. ' Man in the woman's bedroom ' sort of thing. Competent acting. The old school (tie). English Cinema. As cinematic as Shakespeare.

To-day we have three things:

1. CINEMA PROPER (search me).
2. STAGE-PLAY and PART FILMS (a " talkie " film that moves).
3. THEATRE-ON-CELLULOID.

All three can be entertaining, though two are illegitimate cinema. The Above film is England's favourite, NO. 3.

B. V. B.

SHE LOVES ME NOT

PARAMOUNT production. Paramount, who though their stage-play-on-celluloid are no masterpieces are certainly one of the best of the commercial companies, made this.

From a point of view of story matter it is just ridiculous in the extreme, but then it has not much pretentiousness to anything more. There is something very cinematic about the vivacity of Miriam Hopkins, and it is surprising to see the man who makes you cry (in agony), Bing Crosby, acting really well (and not theatrically) in one sequence, where Miriam Hopkins displays herself to his disgust. Such a hotch-potch as this is above the average because its acting is restrained and its incidents perfectly timed. Certainly its tempo never lags, and would be brilliantly alive if only its cutting was cinematic.

But it seems, unfortunately, that the fact that it is far removed from cinema proper, must be taken for granted.

B.V.B.

CHESS-BORED and other G.B. MAGAZINES

directed by Andrew Buchanan

and other Andrew Buchanan G.B. Cine Magazine. Both of these contain an unusual amount of good material and one sequence stands out. This (in *Chess Bored*) is tne abstract sequence featuring Ethel Mannin writing. Her typewriter's work is shown as a visual accompaniment to the literature. Towards the end it is not altogether successful as it strays from the abstract (Irene Nicholson said: ' A misconceived idea which might have worked had it kept purely abstract and wordless as the first shots of water and grass. Buchanan's experiments are stimulating even in failure. Better to explore unfruitful lands than remain in the studio drawing-rooms'.) but, if nothing else, it shows what can be done in these spheres. In other parts of his magazines Buchanan films dance bands and cuts (though not enough) to the rhythm of the music. Fast and slow, with nice compositions. The G.B. Magazine is now issued fortnightly. Amongst the items are some that are weak, but unfortunately advertisement seems to have crept in, though I am sure Buchanan never wanted it. But to go on, once every fortnight, turning out such a high standard, is a marvellous accomplishment.

B.V.B.

LE DERNIER MILLIARDAIRE

scenario and direction by Rene Clair

photography by Rudolph Mate, etc.

Undoubtedly Rene Clair's worst film. There are about three subtle moments, for the rest it is ordinary cheap slapstick put over, no doubt, fairly skilfully. But we expect something more cinematic, more subtle, more significant than this from one of France's best directors. It is amazing how things become ' the fashion '. It is, I think, ' the fashion ' to admire anything by Clair. In that case we are old-fashioned. There is, however, no doubt that even *Le Dernier Milliardiare* is worth seeing, and beneath its cheap comedy are touches of satire that are nicely bitter. B. V. B.

TO WHOM THE GODS DESTROY

directed by Marion Gering
Produced by Columbia Pictures

In this we have three examples of abstract cinema which reach perfection. Beautiful patterns, super-imposition, double image, distortion all play their part in these three sequences, which because the rest of the film is so commonplace and uncreative, are superfluous. But in themselves they are excellent.

B. V. B.

THE PRISONER

American independent film by Roman Freulich

Sometimes a Hollywood cameraman rebels at the monotony of his routine and sets out to make a picture himself . . . Such a one is Roman Freulich, young Russian cameraman of the Universal studios, who has made a twenty minute experimental film, The Prisoner. There is no story. A fugitive from justice, shackled to the sheriff who is bringing him back to justice through the hot Mojavo desert in his car, escapes and discovers how futile is his escape . . . Experiment as the use of sound in counterpoint to visual action is important. There is no question of its sincerity.

I spoke with him before he left for the coast to resume his work. He spoke fondly of doing Robinson Jeffer's well-known poem, Roan Sallion, as a feature picture—a thought, you may be sure, which would not be countenanced by any film producing in the world and which Mr. Freulich, with the zeal of an enthusiast and an uncompromising artist, will have to do with his own money. He mentioned several approaches he has for filming Crime and Punishment—new ventures into psychological cinema expression . . .

The world cinema at large can only justify itself to historians when it will give imaginative young men like Freulich a chance to put their theories into practice and, perhaps, help their bit to found an authentic film language. What a babel of voices are confusing the cinema muse now!

H. G. W.

CARAVAN

directed by Erik Charrel
produced by Fox Films

The musical effects of this film are very pleasant and well played. But it only exists for its pleasant Hungarian (supposed) music. It is, as film, complete jargon, with notably bad photography and standardised acting. It is a good film to see with your eyes shut.

B. V. B.

LILA AKACIE (The Street with white Blossoms)

A Hungarian Film
Produced by Patria-Film
Directed by Skekely Istvan
Photographed by Eiben Istvan
Hunnia Studio

Franz Berkow, our Hungarian representative says:
" If you judge this film on ' film art ' ground you will not find words to express your contempt, but if compared with other Hungarian films you will find is just bearable. The direction is awful, the camerawork worse, the acting artificial, the sets stupid, the sound out-of-tone———but even so it is one of the important Hungarian films! If only because it marks the beginning of film production in a country which has hitherto only made from six to twelve films a year ".
Otherwise Mr. Berkow informs us that *Footlight Parade, Bolero, We're Not Dressing, Men in White* are the most successful films in Hungary. . . . Comment unnecessary.

THE CAT'S PAW

Harold Lloyd Corporation Film

Here all Harold Lloyd's smart gags are fully and well exploited. The whole being cinematic only in that such slapstick is practically impossible on the stage. But the end has a definite built-up climax and, not taken at all seriously, the film is not bad judged purely for what it is and not what some might like to pretend it is.

B. V. B.

WE LIVE AGAIN

directed by Rouben Mamoulian
Produced by United Artists
with Frederick March, Anna Sten, etc.

The church sequence in this weird mixture is neatly filmed, with good cutting and photography, but Anna Sten is like a self-concious girl's first appearance before a snapshot camera. And surely it is unfair to give Frederick March such a part. He is, in some respects, a good film actor (as film actors go).
The typical American film . . . mass production . . . commercial-ideals . . . as good as Hollywood can make . . . and as bad.

B. V. B.

Action Formed with Light
by Francis Bruguiere

Montage with Light
by Francis Bruguiere

NO GREATER GLORY

by Frank Borsage

In spite of the glorious pacific foreword and the occasional superimposition of the magic formula 1914, this kind of saccharine must do more harm than good to the cause of peace. I have condemned propaganda in Russian films because it substitutes teaching for perception. But at least their propaganda technique is convincing and generally understanderable, hereas *No Greater Glory* would make a militarist of the most concientious objector.

I.N.

THREE SONGS OF LENIN

Soviet-Production by Dziga Vertov

Almost every superlative adjective has already been used in admiration of this film. Most of the adjectives were unnecessary for any picture around Lenin must be intensely moving when the impression on his influence is upon the creative endeavour of a hundred and seventy million people of a hundred and fifty something nationalities living on a sixth part of the earth. Since it is impossible to sum up the total force directed into motion by Lenin,it is unreasonable to expect any movie director at the present time to have so profound an understanding of the movement of which Lenin was the articulate voice as to be able to create for it complete expressive form in a medium of art still in its infancy. *Three Songs of Lenin* is no where near as great a picture as some people have declared it to be. It is a sincere construction of a historical document rather than a great work of film art. The formal skeleton upon which Vertov has reconstructed a mass of documentary material, 'shot' by him over a period of seventeen years for a hundred and fifty different pictures, are three songs written by unknown poets of Central Asia. The songs are utterly, almost incredibly personal in their feelings towards Lenin ; he is as great a reality to the writers as their fathers or brothers.

The first song is the Song of Love.

The material is straight forward document cut without any of the earlier experiments characteristic of Vertov's earlier montage.

The second song is the apex of the film—the lying-in-state of Lenin.

The third song—the thoughts of Lenin transalated into rapid action is little more than a super news-reel, a vital and interesting review of social and industrial development—in fact, Stalinism. A certain falsity, not of content but of form enters towards the end with the introduction of the studio shots of various speakers recounting the progress of their work ; they are theatrical in their presentation and they break the rhythm of what is best described as an epic documentary impregnated with an objective lyricism.

M.S.

EPHEMERAL

a 7 minute 16mm (substandard) study by Irene Nicholson
This short experiment—a filmpoem of light and passing time—is slight, and yet movng for its simplicity, its sincerity and general tone and composition.
There is little one can write on such a film—its faults are technical, not aesthetic, and therefore not very serious, and in its short space (too short, it seems) it is a piece of genuine creative cinema.

B. V. B.

Advance note from Kirk Bond (Baltimore U.S.A.) says: . . . " I do want to call your attention to the latest films of Roland Brown (*Blood Money*) and Dieterle (*Fog Over Frisco*). These two seem to me the leading directors in America saving, of course, Von Stroheim, from whom it seems very doubtful that we shall ever get another great film. *Blood Money* is first rate—an immensely supple style plus a curiously sardonic virility peculiar to Brown and very far from the copy book " thoroughness " of the ordinary gangster picture. *Fog Over Frisco* has none of the *Six Hours to Live* stuff, but is just about the fastest dramatic film ever made. It is one gorgeous riot of shots piling on top of one another pell-mell . . . "
(It is interesting to note that Mr. Bond is now working on a film history, to stimulate interest in repertory film presentations.)

THE WORLD MOVES ON

Production: Fox
Directed by John Ford
With Franchot Tone, Madedeine Carrol, etc.

The question of war films is very difficult. The real film of war, which has never been made, would either be too horrible to watch or would be banned immediately by the censor; probably both.
First of all *The World Moves On,* while lacking any strength or real devastating truth, is perfectly sincere, and that alone makes it more than worthwhile. Also it debunks the high hatted ideas of family prestige and (our old friend) ' honour '. Not that these things in themselves are fundamentally wrong, but they become so when taken too far. Also the film in question gets down to essential facts when it emphasises the ridiculous extreme to which nationalism is carried " when you even begin to fight amongst yourselves ". *The World Moves On* is commonplace cinema, judged as such, though there is some good photography in battle sequences and a really beautiful composition of troops returning. But the battle scenes are useless, and not really horrible (except the longshot of the man crawling on his back to a trench). Mass bombardments and blow-ups are all very impressive, of course much too impressive, but it is only when one comes down to individuals that war's real filth is let loose. These are the things that so many are unaware of, and

remember the people who became hysterical in cinemas during *All Quiet On The Western Front* when the shots of clinging hands on barbed wire were shown? But here the trouble: could any audience ever sit through pictures of men with their insides hanging out, of heads blown off with the bodies still standing spurting blood, headless? And of faces that have assumed mask-like appearances through intolerable agony? And of screaming men with no arms or legs running on their stumps?

Aren't these real truths of war's ' glory ' too strong, too terrible, too real, for human endurance? I think they are. (I remember two guardsmen walking out of *Westfront* 1918 with faces almost as agonised as those in the film. I remember at the premier of *All Quiet,* at the Alhambra, London, an old man going hysterical and sending two others near him so. And when *War is Hell* was presented first in London people fainted by the dozen. What would they do if they saw what some saw?).

The emotional and physical suffering of so many millions of innocent men and women is a thing too terrible and large for mere passing comment, and so in films like *The World Moves On* the less terrible (but very important) other aspects are dealt with. In fact the most important things of all; the causes of war.

B.V.B.

REFUGEES

Directed by Gustav Uckicky
Photographed by Fritz Arno Wagner

This film may be anti-revolutionary Russia but is not as anti-communist as the left-wing critics seen to think—all of which is anyway beside the point.

Uskicky has not Eisenstein's or Pudovkin's command of film, but to his unobstrusive imitation of them he adds a quality of his own, rare and valuable, a feeling for deep human emotion expressed in slight visual touches. There are three such moments in the film, where a fanatic in the cause of the refugees realises that his enemy loves his sister, where a young boy dying of a wound realises this too, and where a man turning from the body of a man he has killed, sees sullen faces staring at him and asks " Why do you look at me like that?". The boy dying at dawn simultaneously with the cry of a new born child, seemed a little forced, the only lapse of taste in a well balanced production.

Irene Nicholson

RISING TIDE

Directed by Paul Rotha

The cinematic promise of *Contact* has not been fulfilled. Rotha has a sure eye for photographic composition, a virtue which seems to prevent him thinking cinematically from shot to shot. This film is lacking in visual and dramatic unity and in rhythmic tension.

I. N.

WEATHER FORECAST

Directed by Evelyn Spice

The much advertised sound experiment in this film is negligable. The photography is efficient, but a subject which, dealing as it does with fractions and so far untamed elements might surely have offered some excitement, is as dull as the ironed out voice of the B.B.C. announcer on which the film ends.

I. N.

FORGOTTEN MEN

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JOHN C. MOORE, *Film Art,* vol. 2 No. 5.

Who is correct?

We have requested Mr. Fritz Arno Wagner, the famous German cameraman, to give us his views on the subject, and we hope to publish them in our next number.

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